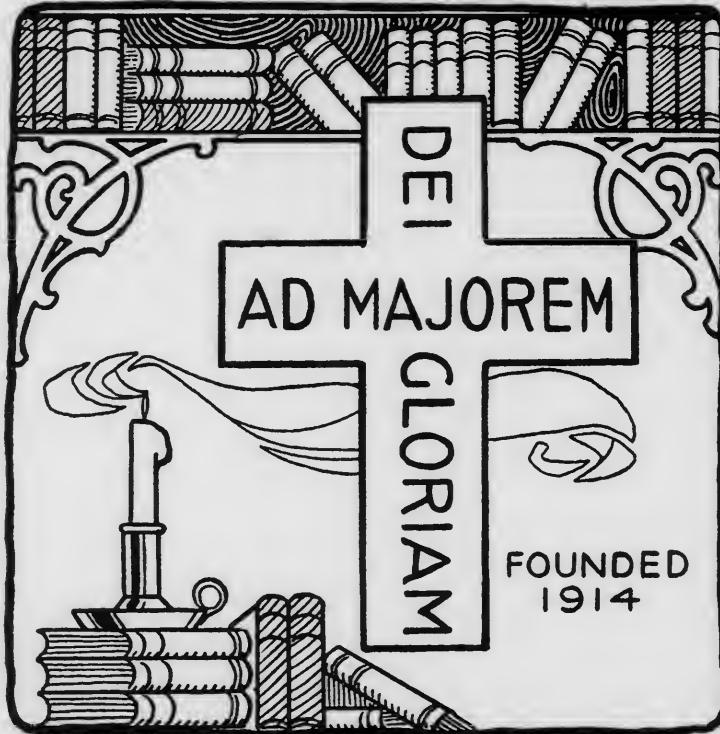


EARLY METHODISM IN BOLTON

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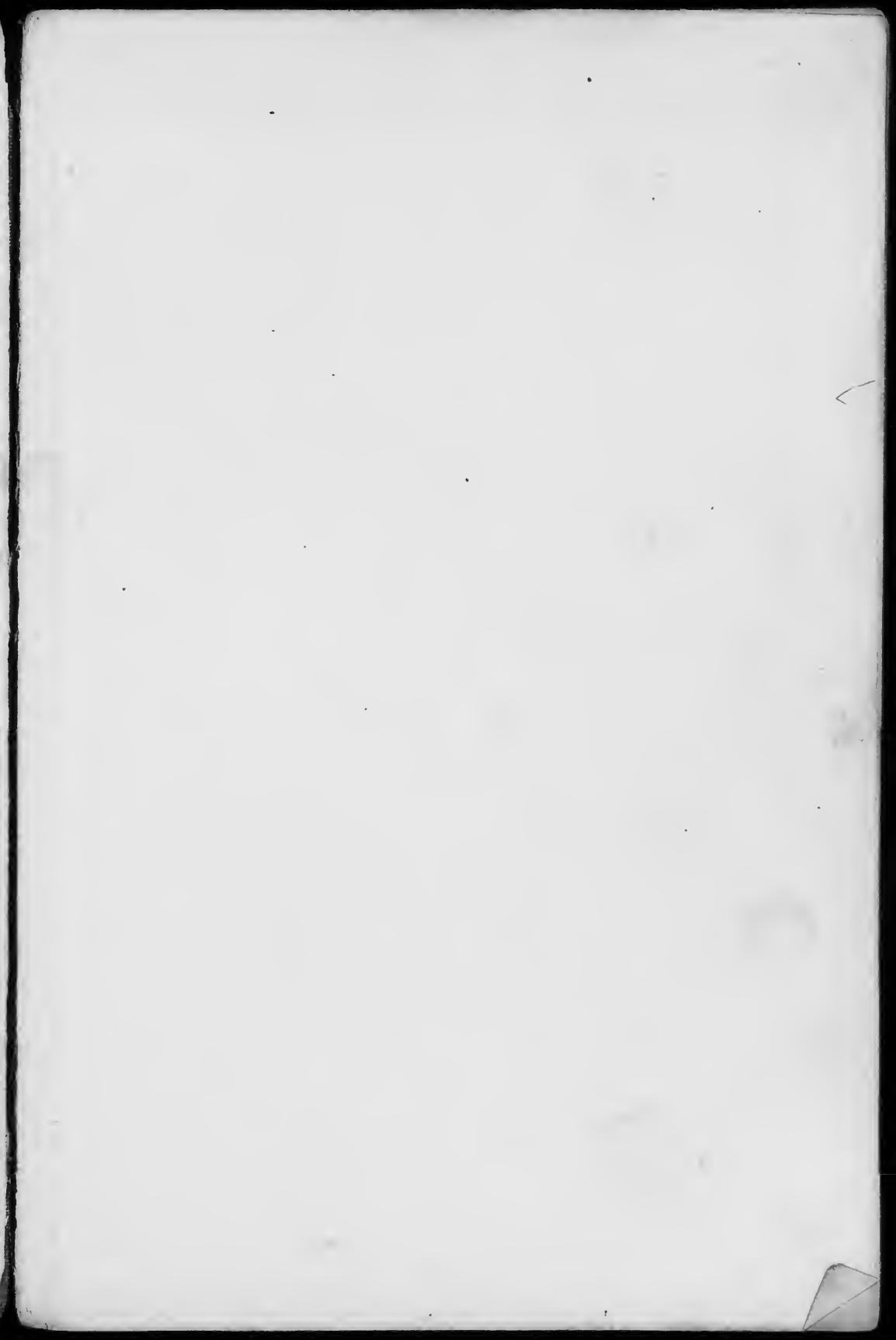
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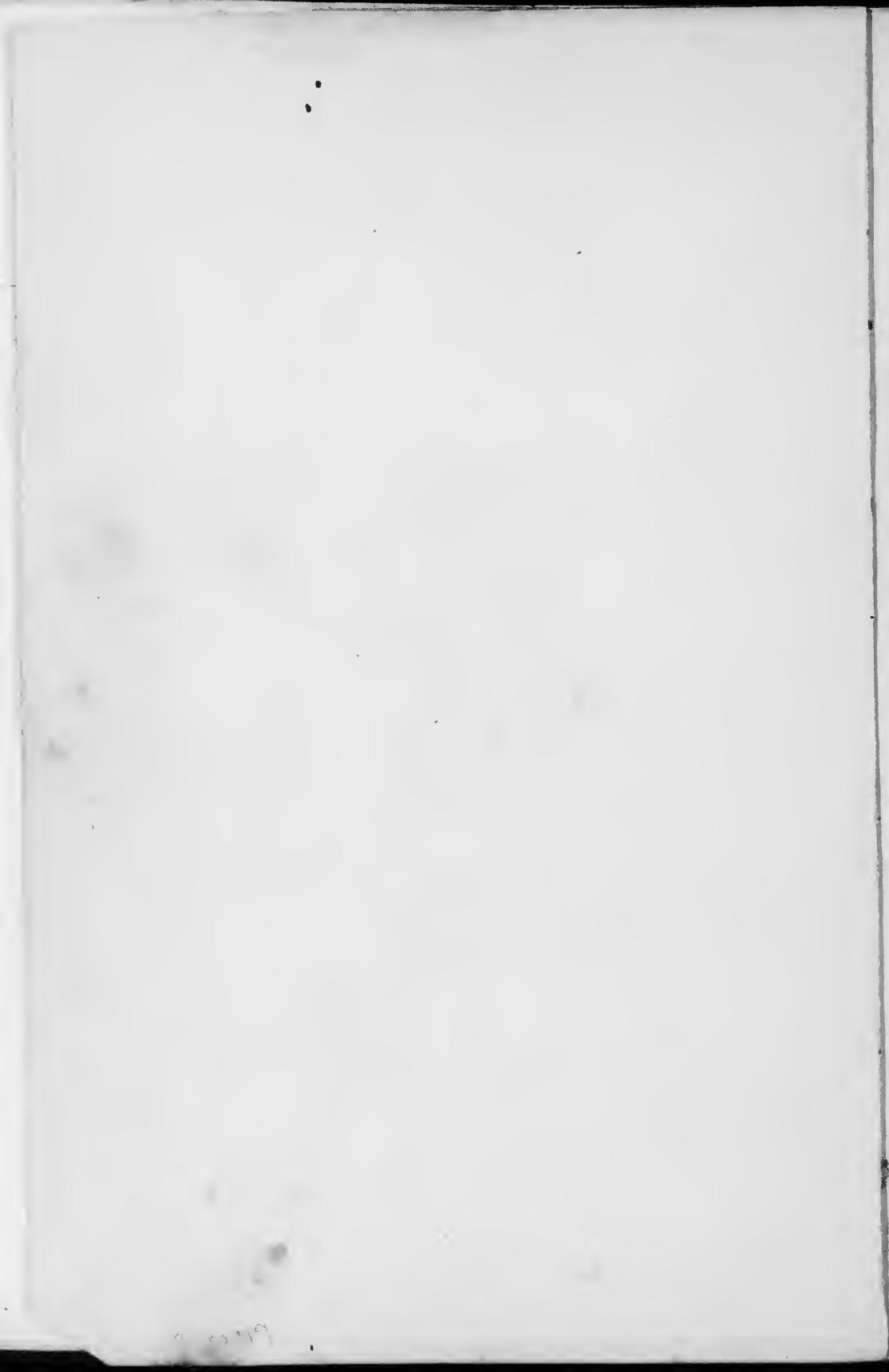


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RECORDS

OF

Early Methodism in Bolton.

A PAPER READ AT THE JUBILEE TEA MEETING IN THE BOLTON
SOUTH CIRCUIT, ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19TH, 1863,

BY A

LAY MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE.

BOLTON:

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The following paper is published at the request of the public meeting at which it was read. The author feels that the sketch is but very imperfect, and craves the reader's considerate indulgence.

Wes. 79

EARLY METHODISM IN BOLTON.

THE personal connection between the Methodists of the last century and those of the present is rapidly passing away. There are few who recollect the men and things of former times. The most favourable period for obtaining information has been suffered to escape, and along with it many interesting facts have passed into oblivion. The motive which has prompted this paper has been a desire to collect as far as possible reminiscences of the early days of Methodism, with reference to the society in Bolton. No person who is at all conversant with Mr. Wesley's journals need be told that this society was held by him in the highest esteem, and never mentioned except in terms of strong commendation. Here he often stayed and was refreshed, and his intercourse, as appears from his journals, and the records of the society's books, must have been of the most familiar and confiding character.

We are not certain as to the precise time when Methodism was introduced to this town, but the most probable is about the years 1746 and 1747. At that time the distinctive features of the society were but beginning to appear. Large portions of the country were marked out and denominated "divisions," but by preachers and people they were commonly called "rounds." To each of these an appointment of preachers was made, partly by agreement at the early Conferences, but generally under the direction of Mr. Wesley, who exercised the power to send preachers wherever he conceived they were most needed, or most

likely to be useful. The "division" with which Bolton stood connected was called "Cheshire," and comprised—1st, Cheshire itself; 2nd, Nottingham; 3rd, Derbyshire; 4th, Lancashire; 5th, Sheffield. In 1748 there were only nine such divisions, in which Ireland and Wales were included. In each division one preacher exercised the power of superintendent, or as he was then called "assistant," and the other preachers were his "helpers." [See Minutes of Conference, vol. 1, new edition.]

At a very early period, Mr. Grimshaw, of Haworth, and John Nelson, were invited to visit Lancashire; and in November, 1747, Mr. Grimshaw, in a letter to Mr. Wesley, makes special reference to the progress of the work in the south of Lancashire, particularly at Bolton, Chowbent, &c., from which we may conclude a society was then in existence.

In the year 1748, Mr. Wesley, in visiting the societies, proceeded from Newcastle to Leeds, Bradford, and on to Haworth, the residence of Mr. Grimshaw, who agreed to accompany him to several neighbouring places. After preaching in the church-yard at Goodshaw on Sunday morning, he proceeded to Bolton, and thus he relates his first visit: "At one I went to the Cross in Bolton; there was a vast number of people, but many of them utterly wild. As soon as I began to speak they began throwing stones to and fro, endeavouring to throw me down from the steps on which I stood; they did so once or twice, but I went up again and continued my discourse; they then began to throw stones, at the same time some got upon the steps of the cross behind me to push me down, on which I could not but observe how

God rules over the minutest circumstances. One man was bawling just at my ear when a stone struck him on the cheek and he was still ; a second was forcing his way down to me and another stone hit him on the forehead, it bounded back, the blood ran down, and he came no farther ; the third being got close to me, stretched out his hand to strike me, and in an instant a sharp stone came upon the joints of his fingers, he shook his hand, and was very quiet till I concluded my discourse and went away." This scene took place at the old cross which stood at the entrance of Churchgate, in the middle of the street.

Mr. Wesley proceeded to Shackerley, afterwards to Davyhulme and Boothbank, in Cheshire, where he was joined by John Bennett, who accompanied him into Derbyshire.

In 1749, Mr. Wesley came again to this circuit, and was four days among the different societies ; he was accompanied by John Bennett, David Taylor, and Mr. P., whom we take to be Mr. Perronet, as he had been with Mr. Wesley through the northern circuits. The journal thus records the visit : " We came to Bolton about five in the evening ; we no sooner entered the main street than we perceived the lions of Rochdale were lambs in comparison with these at Bolton, such rage and bitterness I scarce ever saw before in any creatures that bore the form of men. They followed us in full cry to the house where we went, and as soon as we got in, took possession of all the avenues to it, and filled the street from one end to the other. After some time the waves did not roar quite so loud ; Mr. P. (Perronet) thought we might then venture out ; they immediately closed in

upon him, rolled him in the mire, so that when he scrambled from them and got into the house again we could scarce tell who or what he was. When the first stone came through the window I expected a shower to follow, and the rather because they had procured a bell to call the whole force together; but they did not design to carry on the attack at a distance. Presently one ran up and told us the mob had burst into the house, and added they have got John Bennett in the midst of them. They had, and he laid hold of the opportunity to tell them of the terrors of the Lord. Meantime D. T. (Taylor) engaged a party with softer and smoother words. Believing the time was now come, I walked down into the thickest of them. They had now filled all the rooms below. I called for a chair, the winds were hushed and all was calm and still, my heart was filled with love, my eyes with tears, and my mouth with arguments. They were amazed, they were ashamed, they were melted down, they devoured every word. What a turn was this! Oh how did God change the counsel of the old Ahithophel into foolishness, and bring all the drunkards, swearers, Sabbath breakers, and mere sinners in the place to hear of His plenteous redemption. The day after abundantly more than the house could contain was present at five in the morning, to whom I was constrained to speak much longer than I intended, and perceiving they wanted to hear, I promised to preach again to them at nine, in a meadow near the town. Thither they flocked from every side, and I called aloud, 'All things are now ready, come to the marriage.' Oh how a few hours have changed the scene. We could now walk through

every street in the town, and none molested or opened his mouth, unless to thank and bless us."

In April, 1751, Mr. Wesley came again to the circuit. There are few entries in the journal, though he spent about ten days among the societies within the district.

Respecting Bolton, he says: "By the noise which was in the street I conjectured Satan would try his strength again; but God suffered him not; the mob soon vanished away, and I had both a numerous and quiet congregation. The next day the barber who shaved me said, "Sir, I praise God on your behalf. When you were at Bolton last I was one of the greatest drunkards in the town; but I came to listen at the window, and God struck me to the heart. I then earnestly prayed to God for power against drinking, and he gave me more than I asked; he took away the very desire of it, yet I felt myself worse and worse till on the fifth of April, last year, I could hold out no longer. I felt that I must drop into hell that moment unless God appeared to save me, and He did appear. I knew that He loved me, and I felt sweet peace; but I dared not say I had faith till yesterday twelve months God gave me faith, and His love has ever since filled my heart."

In the year 1751 a chapel was built in Bolton; it was a small square building, and still stands in what is called Hotel-street. Not much money was subscribed towards its erection, and consequently a considerable debt remained for several years. In order to remove this, Mr. Pawson made a collection through the circuit, and two years afterwards Mr. Alexander Mather did the same; the two collections amounted to

£53, and the remaining debt was liquidated by successive grants made by the Conference, from a fund raised for the purpose of paying off chapel debts. The settlement of this chapel upon what was afterwards called "the Conference plan," was made the ostensible cause of a serious division in the Bolton society in the year 1752. Mr. Bennett, who was at that time the "assistant" in this circuit, had for some time previously been verging towards Calvinistic, if not Antinomian views. [See Wesley's works, vol. 11, page 483.] This, in connection with other causes probably more latent, led him to seek occasion for separating from Mr. Wesley. The deed of this chapel had been drawn up on the same principle as those of other places. There were some minor differences in the earlier deeds, as it was not until 1762 that Conference prepared the form of deed which was afterwards adopted. In this, as in many subsequent ruptures in Methodism, it was sought to propagate the mischievous error, so well calculated to mislead the uninformed—that chapels thus settled became the rightful possession of Mr. Wesley, or otherwise the Conference.

Mr. Wesley, with a sagacity peculiar to himself, and no doubt directed by the providence of God, fore-saw the possibility and danger of the churches which he and his helpers were planting throughout the kingdom, becoming altogether different in doctrine and discipline from their original character (instances of which were frequently occurring in Presbyterian and Baptist churches). This he sought to prevent by giving a *fixity of purpose for ever*, or so long as the Conference remained in existence, to all the houses and chapels which were erected for the people he had raised up.

This applied to the ministerial agency, as well as to the doctrines to be preached, both of which are specified in the deeds. The chapels were legally settled upon trustees, who are responsible for the use and appropriation of the property. The power to appoint ministers was reserved to John Wesley and others therein named, and on their decease, to the Conference, which should appoint from time to time accredited ministers, to preach only such doctrines as are conformable with Mr. Wesley's four volumes of sermons and his notes on the New Testament.

This question has on many occasions been agitated for various purposes, both within and without the pale of Methodism. At various times there have been men, who, in an envious or unfriendly spirit, have endeavoured to find in it a weapon by which to injure the character of the Society. But the experience of a century has only served to confirm and strengthen the conviction of the incalculable service, which the original "plan" of Mr. Wesley's has rendered. It has been confirmed, by the highest legal authority, and by it a perfect uniformity in doctrine and system of church government has been firmly maintained, so that the Wesleyan Methodists, and all friends who contribute to the erection of their places of worship, possess an assurance such as can be found in connection with no other Protestant church in the country, that the buildings thus settled will in perpetuity be employed for their original purpose.

This power to appoint preachers, however, was put forward as a sufficient cause to justify the most extreme measures. Mr. Bennett sought thereby to prejudice the minds of the people against Mr. Wesley.

The most severe reflections were cast upon him before the societies. The altered views which Mr. Bennett had imbibed led him also to charge Mr. Wesley with "preaching Popery," "making nothing of Christ," and "denying the doctrine of justification by faith." Those who are conversant with the polemics of that day, will at once perceive the character of the new creed Mr. B. had embraced, and from which he deduced such conclusions. The extreme bitterness of spirit which at that time characterised the advocates of this creed, was exhibited in this instance in the highest degree, and it became an easy task to turn aside the uninstructed converts, and alienate them from the fold into which they had so recently been gathered. The minutes of Conference fail to supply any numerical information respecting this early division in the Cheshire district, the numbers not then being stated in the yearly minutes; but a widely-spread agitation commenced among the societies, and that at Bolton felt its destructive influence most severely.

Mr. Wesley's conduct in this affair seems to have been distinguished by singular patience and forbearance. He took no steps to prevent Mr. Bennett using the pulpits, although this liberty was employed on many occasions to his own personal injury, and to unsettle the societies, by the spread of doctrines entirely at variance with those taught by the Wesleys, and embraced by the people who had been entrusted to his charge. No doubt for special reasons Mr. Wesley preferred that Mr. Bennett should voluntarily withdraw from the Methodist ministry, which he ultimately did, and established an Independent congre-

gation in Bolton, taking with him nearly all the Society.

The entries in Mr. Wesley's journal, bearing upon this division, are as follows: 1752. "After preaching in the evening, I took occasion to tell the whole congregation—1. That there had been a mistake concerning the house which Jno. Bennett imagined I had contrived to make my own property, but Mr. Grimshaw had now cleared it up, having assured Mr. B. that I knew nothing of the deed relating to the house till after it was made—2. That I had no property in it still; only a clause was inserted whereby Mr. Grimshaw, my brother, and I were empowered to appoint preachers thereto."

In 1753, Mr. Wesley was at Bolton on two occasions, April and June, a fact which attests the interest he felt in the society's welfare. He remarks "I rode to Bolton, and found the society just double what it was when I was here last; and they are increased in grace no less than in numbers, walking closely with God, lovingly and circumspectly with one another, and wisely toward them that are without."

Again, 1755, "I rode to Bolton, being now among those who are no 'strangers to the covenant of promise,' I had no need to lay the foundation again, but exhorted them to 'rejoice evermore.' Their number is a little reduced since I was here before, and no wonder, while the sons of strife are on every side, some for Mr. Bennett, some for Mr. Wheatley. The little flock, notwithstanding, hold on their way, looking straight to the prize of their high calling."

Again, 1765, "I rode to Bolton. The house was filled in the evening, and the hearts of many

filled with peace and joy in believing. On Good Friday I preached at ten and six. What a blessed calm has God at length given to this poor shattered society! For many years the men of bitter and contentious spirit were harassing them continually, but they are now sunk into quiet formal Presbyterians, and those they have left enjoy God and one another."

In the life of Chas. Wesley, vol. 1, page 588, there is a notice respecting Jno. Bennett. The author says "It will be observed Mr. C. Wesley speaks of J. B. with great respect and affection. Some of the preachers at the Leeds Conference of 1751 doubted the soundness of John's theological principles, and would fain have instituted an inquiry into the subject, but Charles screened him from their attacks. His temper was indeed soured, but Charles thought he might be reclaimed by kindness, especially as Bennett disavowed all intention of retiring from the itinerant ministry in connection with his old friends. In this, however, he was mistaken. Before the end of the year Bennett became more violent, avowed his belief of the Calvinian theory, and ultimately became an Independent minister, to the grief of his excellent wife, who had been brought to God through the ministry of the Wesleys, and sincerely loved them for their work's sake."

Mrs. Bennett survived her husband forty years. She again joined the old society, and died in communion with the people she so well knew and so much loved. The late Dr. Bunting visited her during her last illness, and after her death preached her funeral sermon.

The effect of this painful division upon many of the societies was most lamentable, Manchester and

Bolton especially. The occasion drew together into this quarter a band of men who previously had been connected with the Wesleys and Mr. Whitefield, but who had become corrupt both in morals and doctrine. "Cudworth was a thorough Antinomian," Wheatley was an immoral character, and had been expelled from the ministry, and "Ball was the worst person in the unholy fraternity." These men, with others like themselves "of bitter and contentious spirit," were allowed to make common cause, and were welcomed by the seceders so long as their influence served to injure the character of Mr. Wesley, and to break up his societies. [See C. Wesley's life, vol. 2, 127.]

Mr. Wesley chose to refrain from taking part in the contest, but Charles spent a considerable time in Manchester and neighbourhood endeavouring to "calm the spirits" of those who still adhered to the society, of whom he says "It is a miracle that two of them are left together." We read in Mr. Wesley's Journal that the Bolton society was "reduced to twelve" (would that we could record their honoured names), these, however, by "walking circumspectly with one another, and wisely toward them that are without," soon turned the current of public opinion into another channel, and "the little one became a thousand."

The following is a list of leaders in this society, some of whom no doubt received their appointment at the hands of Mr. Wesley. In 1768: George Eskrick, Richard Whitaker, Henry Hurley, George Barlow, William Rothwell, Joseph Grime, Joseph Draper, Richard Aspinal, James Ridley, Thomas Smith. In 1769: William Taylor, William Grime.

In 1772: Robert Lord, George Haydock, Thomas Whylde. In 1779: William Entwistle, Robert Crompton, Richard Dalton, Thomas Taylor, John Lee, and Laurence Beswick.

In one of the old society books, now in the possession of the trustees, there is also a record of all the members of the society in Bolton in the year 1768. The number of names is 143, with their places of abode, from which registry we also learn the nature of their occupations, and it is worthy of remark, that there is not a name, male or female, without some business attached. Thus: Peter Rothwell, wheelwright, Ann Rothwell, spinner (the grandfather and grandmother of the late Peter Rothwell, Esq., of Sunning Hill); Giles Higson, fustian maker; Margaret Higson, spinner; George Eskrick, weaver; Ellen Eskrick, spinner; George Barlow, weaver; Catherine Barlow, spinner; Peter Haslam, shoemaker; Priscilla Haslam, spinner, &c., &c.

From Mr. French's life of Crompton, we learn that in 1769 he used to assist his mother to spin upon what was called "one of Hargreaves' jennies. It was a modification of the ordinary one-handed wheel, by which 16 threads might be spun at the same time by a turn or motion of one hand and a draw of the other." And no doubt it was with these domestic wheels, or otherwise "jennies," which so many of the goodly women of that day were so honourably, and, no doubt, profitably employed. They appear to approach the standard character of "a virtuous woman," as drawn by the pen of inspiration, whose "price is above rubies." "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her; she shall do him good, and not evil, all

the days of her life ; she seeketh wool or flax and worketh willingly with her hands ; she layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff ; she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." There were no mills nor tall chimneys in those days ; the cotton trade in its infancy was carried on under the roof of the cottage ; a ready occupation was found for every branch of the family ; the cupboard was filled with plenty ; and where sobriety and virtuous habits were practised, nothing in that day surpassed the comfort and happiness of the hand-loom weaver's home.

By the Minutes of Conference 1765 and 1766, we find the circuits very much increased, and the original "round" called "Cheshire" divided into Lancashire, Derbyshire, Sheffield, and Cheshire circuits. In 1769, Lancashire was divided into Lancashire South, and Lancashire North, Bolton being in the south circuit. The appointment that year was Alex. Mather and J. Standring. In 1771 the term "Lancashire" ceases in the stations, and two circuits, Manchester and Liverpool, appear instead, Bolton belonging to the latter circuit. The appointment being Parson Greenwood and Samuel Woodcock. Although Liverpool was the head of the circuit, the first quarterly meeting was held at Bolton, afterwards alternately in the two places.

It will be interesting to present here a copy of the receipts and disbursements of this first quarterly meeting, held October 8th, 1776. The amount sent from each place represents the quarterage or "ticket money," which will be afterwards explained.

Dr.	£	s.	d.	Cr.	£	s.	d.
Liverpool	5	1	2	Paid Mr. Greenwood			
Meols	0	11	0	for himself	3	3	0
Wigan	0	12	0	Travelling expenses	0	10	6
Moulden Water	0	5	0	Mrs. Greenwood, for			
Coal pits	0	17	0	herself	2	10	0
Aspull-moor	0	8	0	Mr. Greenwood, for			
Edgworth	0	7	6	two children ..	1	6	0
Leigh	0	5	0	Paid Mr. Woodcock,			
Shackerley	0	5	0	for himself	3	3	0
Chowbent	0	6	2	Travelling expenses	0	10	6
Warrington	0	10	6	Mrs. Woodcock, for			
Budworth	0	11	9	herself	2	10	0
Northwich	0	13	0	Mr. Woodcock's rent	0	10	0
Little Leigh	1	7	0				
Preston-on-the-Hill ..	0	14	6				
Bolton	4	4	0				
	£16	18	8		£14	3	0

The next meeting was held at Liverpool, and in April, 1772, again at Bolton, when Mr. Wesley was himself present, and received the quarterage along with the other ministers. It is entered thus:—

Paid Mr. Wesley for himself

Travelling expenses

3 3 0

0 10 6

So much for circuit expenses and quarter-day business. The weekly contributions in the classes remain unaccounted for. At this period no account of that part of the society's income came before the quarterly meeting. It appears to have been expended at different places, in providing lodgings for the preachers, the keep of their horses, and other incidental expenses. A specimen page from the Bolton old book will explain.

	Dr.	£	s.	d.
1770.	Brought forward	0	2	5½
April 2.	Received from classes	0	5	0
„ 27.	Do. do.	0	9	6
May 5.	Do. do.	0	8	2
„ 12.	Do. do.	0	18	3
„ 13.	Do. do.	0	10	10
„ 26.	Do. do.	0	10	3
June 2.	Do. do.	0	13	3
„ 9.	Do. do.	0	13	1

	DR.	£	s.	d.
June 16.	Do. do.	0	3	2
,, 23.	Do. do.	0	1	11
,, 30.	Do. do.	1	16	5
July 7.	Do. do.	1	17	6
,, 16.	Do. do.	0	8	11
	To Seat money.....	6	16	7
		£	15	15 3½
July 26. Received		2	2	4
		£	17	17 7½
	Cr.	£	s.	d.
For shoeing horses.....		0	4	3
Cleaning candlesticks.....		0	2	2
Spreading hills on meadow.....		0	2	5
Paid rent for house, £1. 5s. 6d.; barber, 3d.		1	5	9
Cleaning room.....		0	2	0
Attending horse, 68 nights at 2d.....		0	11	4
Making and mending windows in house		1	18	7
Corn and straw to Peter Rothwell.....		0	12	0
Quire of paper.....		0	0	10
William Crompton, for corn		0	19	0
Bread for lovefeast.....		0	0	6
Ale for workmen and altering room....		1	3	0
Quarterly meeting		2	3	0
R. Whittaker for candles		1	6	5
A lock for candles		0	1	0
Preachers' charges from January 27th to				
July 7th		7	0	8½
Paid for shoeing horses.....		0	1	8
Mr. Costerdine two nights, and Mr.				
Mather one		0	3	0
		£	17	17 7½

July, 1770. Balanced before A. Mather, &c.

The foregoing sufficiently exhibits the way the affairs of circuits were then conducted. It would have been easy to select pages more curious and amusing, truly indicative of the simple and primitive character of those early days. The charge of 1s. per night, generally accompanied with 2d. or 3d. for barber, "corn and hay for the horse," "paper and letters," exhibits the way in which the early preachers accomplished their "rounds." At that time they were pro-

perly called "*travelling preachers*." The money allowance for a preacher and his family for one year would not exceed £30. 1s. per night was allowed by the societies to provide food and lodging, and for their general maintenance, the preachers must have depended on the hospitality of the members and friends, who no doubt gladly received them to their houses, and set before them such fare as they could best afford. The item "preacher's board" does not appear in the society's accounts until 1784.

These observations are confirmed by a minute of Conference, 1788, which reads thus: "Many of our preachers have been obliged to go from the house of one friend to another for all their meals, to their great loss of time, and the injury of the work of God. What can be done to prevent this? Answer: Let every circuit provide a sufficient allowance for the preachers, that they may get their meals at their own lodgings." It is worthy of note that Bolton had anticipated this necessity by making such provision as soon as it became the head of a circuit.

The practice of calling "at the houses of the friends" may serve to explain how very *pastoral* the early preachers were thought to be by those who lived in earlier times; and whose speeches have sometimes filled us with wonder, as they told us how it was in their day, and in the old time before them. Two things may be safely inferred, viz.: 1st, that much of this visitation arose out of *necessity*; and 2nd, that, judging from the character and habits of the men, their visits would be turned to great spiritual profit, and would also leave a blessing behind.

We come now to the year 1776, when a new

chapel was opened in Ridgway-gates. We suppose it stands on the site which was originally "the meadow," where was grown the hay for the preachers' horses, and with reference to which there are so many entries in the society's books, such as "tilling," "mowing, hay making, mooing," &c. The chapel stood nearly in the centre of the open field outside the town. A house was built adjoining the chapel for the preacher, and at the east end Mr. Hopper built another for himself when he retired from the work of the ministry. These might be called *rural* dwellings. Speedily, however, other houses were built, and George Eskrick was the first occupant of the one on the west side of Ridgway-gates, which stands nearest the chapel.

Of this chapel Mr. Wesley speaks in terms of high commendation, he says, "I preached in the evening in one of the most *elegant houses* in the *kingdom*; and to one of the liveliest congregations; and this I must avow, there is not such a set of singers in any Methodist congregation in the three kingdoms, there cannot be; for we have a hundred such trebles—boys and girls selected out of our Sunday School, and accurately taught, as are not found together in any chapel, cathedral, or music-room, within the four seas; besides, the spirit with which they sing, and the beauty of many of them, so suits the melody, that I defy any to exceed it, except the singing of angels in our Father's house."

Again in 1790, on his last tour through this part of the country, he makes the following entry in his journal: "In the evening I preached in that *lovely house* at Bolton, and to one of the liveliest congregations in England, who, by patient continuance in well-

doing, have turned scorn and hatred into general esteem and goodwill."

It is certainly a fact that no Methodist chapel (City-road, in London, excepted) could at all compare with that of Bolton ; neither those of Hull, nor Yarm, nor the celebrated Boggart House, in Leeds, were equal to it in size, elegance, or adaptation ; and this superiority was maintained until the year 1781, when the Oldham-street Chapel, Manchester, was opened by Mr. Wesley, who simply says of it, "It is about the size of that in London." Looking at the position of the Manchester and Bolton societies, we must regard the effort put forth by the latter, as highly creditable, and it may be said with truth that the Bolton Methodists of that day set a noble example by erecting a house worthy of the cause they had espoused, thereby placing themselves in advance of other societies in the country, and commanding at home increased respect.

We now possess no means of ascertaining what this erection cost, or how much was subscribed towards it. There are entries of two sums paid from the society's funds to George Eskrick "on account of the new building;" and there were no doubt subscriptions which, together with the proceeds from the sale of the old chapel, would, we suppose, amount to about one-third of the entire cost. Upwards of one thousand pounds had to be borrowed, and this was obtained on no further security than the promissory notes of a few men who were principally hand-loom weavers, a fact which speaks louder than words as to the estimate placed upon their moral and religious character. Different individuals lent the money—Mr. Hopper,

£120 ; Mrs. Elizabeth Melling, £200 ; George Haydock, £140 ; Mr. Meredith, £100 ; and Mr. Woolrich, of Chester, £500. The names to Mr. Woolrich's two notes were as follows : For £400, dated October, 1776, Thomas Smith, weaver, Robert Lord, shopkeeper, Richard Whitaker, shopkeeper, James Best, grocer, James Beswick, weaver, Thomas Smith, weaver, Sharples, and George Eskrick, weaver ; for £100 of later date, Richard Aspinal, cabinet maker, George Eskrick, weaver, William Grime, weaver, Thomas Smith, weaver, and James Beswick, weaver. In the year 1812 the money which was borrowed of Mr. Woolrich was paid to his executors, who, after his decease, had requested a bond from the trustees as "collateral security." The men whose names were appended to the original notes had nearly all disappeared from the record which they had so honourably adorned. Thirty-one years had brought another generation on the stage of action, and the former had gone to their eternal reward. On the completion of this payment, and the giving up of the notes and bonds, the trustees made this memorandum in their book of proceedings : "N.B. The aforesaid bond and notes, being paid off, were produced, and the notes destroyed, the seals cut from the bond and ordered to be deposited in the iron chest and preserved as a curiosity." The curiosity of the documents in the estimation of the framers of this memorandum being no doubt the fact that such large sums of money had been lent to such men on no other security than their joint note of hand, by which they made themselves responsible for sums amounting in all probability to more than they possessed ; but this proves how strong

was their confidence in God and the cause they had espoused, the ultimate success of which their faith seems to have realised.

The most prominent characters in this early society were not men who became extensively known. They were generally in humble circumstances, and were distinguished more by their deep piety than by extraordinary talent. Their attachment to Methodism was deep and unwavering, and their official duties in the church as leaders, local preachers, or Sabbath-school teachers, were discharged with singular fidelity and diligence. At an early period of their history many of them were accustomed to perform long journeys in order to hear the Gospel preached by Mr. Wesley or other noted preachers of the day. Very frequently some of the Methodists of Bolton would be seen in Manchester at an early hour of the Sabbath for the purpose of attending the early class meeting and the morning and afternoon services. We have been told of a man, who resided at Wigan, named Langshaw, who frequently came to Bolton, was there joined by a companion or two, and who would set off to Manchester, carrying their shoes in their pockets, which they put on in a plantation near that town, leaving their clogs hid until they returned.

George Eskrick appears to have been a leading character. He was a native of York, and probably came to Lancashire because of the high wages then paid for weaving. He had a bold, determined spirit; and it was at his house the preachers lodged when in Bolton. This, no doubt, gave George some importance, as some of his guests were men of distinguished character — Wesley, Benson, Pawson,

Mather, and on one occasion "Squire Brackenbury himself and man, six nights," for which 6s. are charged. It does appear to us that George was performing a generous act towards the society by this scale of charges, as supper, bed, and breakfast must have been furnished as the rule, and in other respects comfortable provision made. Ellen, his wife, was a clean, orderly, sensible woman, and would on all occasions conspire with her husband to render kindly service. It is related of George than on one occasion he thought he should administer reproof to Mr. Wesley, who had visited Manchester, and passed on by Warrington to Liverpool without calling at Bolton. Hearing of this George at once set off to Liverpool on foot, and arrived at the house where Mr. W. was staying very early in the morning. Mr. Wesley was in bed, and the people of the house desired him to wait or call again, but he insisted on seeing Mr. W., who, on being informed as to the name of his visitor, told them to let him come upstairs. George, in his clogs, paced into Mr. Wesley's room, and fixing a keen upbraiding look upon him, gave utterance to his feelings in this short, curt, sentence: "Well, I suppose us poor souls at Bolton may go to the devil for anything you care," and immediately turned his back and left the room, Mr. Wesley kindly calling after him, "George, George, I will be at Bolton as soon as you." It was said that Mr. Wesley's carriage overtook George near the toll-bar at Daubhill, a seat was offered, but the good man's spirit was not yet subdued by the gentleness of his loving friend, and he coolly replied, "No, sir; I would rather walk on." This circumstance we conclude took place in 1755. [See Wesley's Journal, vol. 2,

page 327.] It was at a period when the Bolton society passed through a fiery ordeal, occasioned by the seceders who had left with John Bennett, a circumstance to which Mr. Wesley makes direct allusion at the time. This may account for the huge disappointment at Mr. W. passing Bolton on his way to Liverpool, and also to some extent apologising for the uncourteous language used to Mr. Wesley, whose presence and support were felt to be of special importance at this juncture.

An aged lady, who was a resident in Bolton when the Ridgway-gates Chapel was erected, has often related another circumstance illustrative of George's character. A timid friend intimated that there would arise a difficulty in procuring sand for the new erection, as it could only be obtained from one person, who it was conjectured would not sell it for the building of a Methodist Chapel. George appeared to take no notice of the suggestion, but at intervals quietly sent for a load of sand and deposited it in a corner of the meadow, and when the chapel had to be built there was found sufficient to supply the contract. Perhaps no danger need have been anticipated, but no risk must be run, and it suited George's turn of mind to encounter a difficulty. Another element of his character was brought out on the laying of the foundation stone of the new building. After the ceremony was over, and the friends had left to partake of some refreshments, George Eskrick and George Barlow remained on the ground, and quietly set to work to enlarge the area of the intended building by drawing the pegs and removing the line and stone a foot further out. This was never discovered until the

principal timbers for the roof had to be applied, when the altered measurement caused no small perplexity. Upon enquiry being made the guilty parties acknowledged what they had done, and attempted to justify their conduct by saying "We thought the Lord should have another foot." This injudicious act might have caused serious difficulty had not Mr. Peter Rothwell, the contractor, by mere accident prevented the beams being cut to the length originally intended.

Notwithstanding many singularities, George Eskrick was a valuable man in the society, and a faithful, zealous servant of Jesus Christ. In the midst of various opposition, the members of this infant church rallied round him, and his firmness and decision became to them a tower of strength. We have reason to believe that George was one of the first office bearers in the society. He was spared to a good old age: his name appears as a trustee for Bridge-street Chapel, which was not built until 1803. He removed from Bolton, and lodged with a family of the name of Langshaw, at Sharples, and died there in the year 1807. An immense concourse of people attended his funeral, many of whom testified their esteem by pressing towards the coffin that they might share the honour of bearing his remains to the tomb.

There were other men whose piety and usefulness made a lasting impression on the public of that day. We have often heard honourable mention made of William Grime, Thomas Greenhalgh, George Walkden, Joseph Twiss, Thomas Bamber, John Entwistle (generally called John Enty), and Joseph Kay, men who stood out from the common rank. And we would

add a few names of men whom we personally recollect, who caught the spirit of their fathers, and respecting whom it may be said their memory is still sweet and fragrant: Thomas Brandwood, William Moscrop, John Thornley, Robert Dawson, John Moscrop, and Thomas Taylor, men who passed through many trials and discouragements, who devoted their best energies to the various departments of the work of God, and who "nobly for their Master stood." They were indeed "living epistles known and read of all men."

It may be our duty now to give prominence to the preachers who, under God, were the means of calling into existence and forming into united operation this and other kindred societies. To accomplish this the greatest difficulties had to be surmounted and the severest privations endured. It is impossible now to form an adequate conception of the work the early Methodist preachers did. On this subject, Mr. Watson, in his life of Wesley, says, "No provision was made at this early period for their maintenance, they took neither 'purse nor scrip,' they cast themselves upon the providence of God and the hospitality and kindness of the societies, and were by them, like the primitive preachers, 'helped forward after a godly sort.' On their journeys to open new places, and to instruct those for whose souls 'no man cared,' it might be truly said of them as of the first propagators of Christianity, 'they had no certain dwelling place.' Under the severity of labour and the wretched accommodation to which they cheerfully submitted, many a fine constitution was broken and premature death was often induced."

It is impossible to contemplate the labours of Mr. Wesley and his coadjutors, without being impressed with the fact that such men were raised up by the special providence of God. They were fit instruments for the work assigned them. All worldly aims were abandoned that they might seek and save the souls of men. This was their one object. All other pursuits were made subservient to this. They endured hardness in almost every form, and they became "all things to all men, that by all means they might save some."

The success which attended their labours is remarkable. Everywhere the conversion of souls followed the delivery of their message. Notorious sinners were arrested, and began to lead a new life. "True, genuine, experimental religion took a wide spread in the nation, such as no modern history finds a parallel instance." Lancashire shared very largely the labours of the most eminent of these servants of Jesus Christ. Among the preachers appointed to the Liverpool circuit, of which Bolton was part, we find the names of men greatly esteemed for their extensive usefulness, and Christopher Hopper appears to have taken especial interest in the success of the Bolton society. In 1774 and 1775 he laboured with great zeal for its success, and when in 1784 it became the head of a circuit, he was appointed superintendent and remained two years, again in 1787 one year; and in 1792 when he retired from the full work, he settled in Bolton as a supernumerary, where he died in 1802. We cannot give a more correct idea of the ministry of that period than by quoting the Conference obituary of this eminent man:—

"Christopher Hopper was an aged veteran in the armies of Immanuel; one of the first Methodist preachers, and the oldest upon the list at the time of his decease. He was brought to the saving knowledge of God in the year 1743, and soon after became a preacher of that Gospel which he had found to be the power of God to his own salvation. At a time when the land was covered with gross darkness, and there was little or no genuine vital religion to be found, and when those eminent servants and messengers of God, the Rev. Messrs. Wesleys and Whitefield, were opposed and persecuted with great rage and violence, he stood forth as a determined witness for God and His truth against the combined powers of earth and hell. The insults and violence of avowed enemies, and the persuasion and entreaties of mistaken friends, he equally disregarded ; and persisted to testify, and frequently at the hazard of his life, 'repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesns Christ,' wherever a door was opened, and he could have access. In private houses, barns, stables, on mountains or plains, in streets and market-places, in cities, towns, and villages, wherever any could be found that were willing to hear, he was ready to testify the Gospel of the grace of God, and this he did with peculiar ability and success. He was a Boanerges, a son of thunder: his word was with power, and stout-hearted sinners trembled from time to time under the awful and alarming message his Lord gave him to deliver. He feared the face of no man : he declared the whole counsel of God with clearness and energy wherever he came, and the Lord crowned the labours of His servant with great success. Scores, yea, hundreds, were convinced of the error of

their ways, and converted to God, by his instrumentality in different parts of the British empire, especially during the early days of his ministry. He laboured nowhere without more or less fruit ; and the seals of his mission were many, and may be found at this day in most parts of the kingdom in which he laboured. As to his character as a man and a Christian, he was a person of peculiar integrity, and of most unblemished morals. He adorned the Gospel which he preached, by an unblameable conversation. During the forty years that he continued as a travelling preacher, no charge or accusation was ever brought against him for any instance of misconduct. He was prudent, steady, zealous, and active, especially during his younger days. And after that, in consequence of the increasing infirmities of declining years, he judged it right to settle at Bolton as a superannuated preacher, he continued to labour in that and the neighbouring circuits, as far as he had strength, and there was an open door. After having preached Christ crucified for the space of fifty-seven years, having dislocated his shoulder, he suffered exquisite pain for many weeks before his death ; but he bore it all with most exemplary patience, was preserved in great peace of mind, and frequently refreshed with strong consolation. To a friend, who visited him a few days before his decease, he said, ' I have not the shadow of a doubt ; and as for the enemy, I know not what is become of him. I have neither seen him nor heard of him for a long time : I think he has quitted the field.' He retained his confidence to the last, and, when he slept in Jesus, was in the eightieth year of his age."

In the year 1784, Bolton was made the head of a circuit, which comprised the following places: Bolton, Nab in Turton, Bury, Unsworth, Shackerley, Chow-bent, Lawton Common, Wyngates, Aspull-moor, Lam-berhead-green, and Wigan. The total income for the first quarter was £20 1s. 1d., and the expenditure was £22 8s. 8d. Two ministers were stationed on the circuit, viz., C. Hopper and W. Eells. There were about 430 members at the beginning, and two years later, the numbers were 650. Perhaps in no subsequent period has there been greater unanimity and success than in those two years.

In 1789, Leigh was added to Bolton; in 1793, Wigan and Leigh were separated, and Wigan became a circuit; in 1796, Leigh was again incorporated with Bolton; in 1804, Bury became a circuit, and the year after Wigan was again joined with Bolton, and remained so until 1812, when it was again made a circuit, leaving Bolton with the same boundary as now comprises the North and South Circuits, then numbering 1,400 members of society.

It would be interesting to trace the history of the Bolton society since the year 1812, and comment upon the surprising increase which took place during the eight following years, the number of members in 1820 being 1,750; and on the great decrease which followed, when, in 1827, the numbers were reduced to 1,070. For this painful decline it might not be difficult to assign probable causes. Mistaken principles of action, however well-intentioned they may be, will seldom fail to produce their natural consequences. It would, however, serve no valuable end, and we judge it wiser to allow the subject to pass into

oblivion, and point only to the steady improvement which every year since then, with one or two insignificant exceptions, has taken place. This improvement has been apparent in every department, financial as well as numerical. By the exertions of a few of the leading officers, some of whom have passed away, while others are now carrying the "hoary head which is a crown of glory," because still "found in the way of righteousness," a great change in the position of the Trust Estate, which had become greatly embarrassed, was effected, and the way prepared for those vast extensions which have recently taken place. In 1803, Bridge-street Chapel was built. In 1819, Fletcher-street Chapel was opened. For some years this extension was unpromising, but in 1827 a Sabbath school was commenced, and from that time the cause has gradually strengthened, and is at present one of the most important interests in the North Circuit. In 1850, the Bradshawgate Chapel was built, and this effort, together with other important extensions for educational purposes, was very successful, and led at length to the division of the circuit, which took place in 1857. The number of members in society had then reached 2,280. Since that period the North and South Circuits have been distinguished by great activity. Two elegant chapels have been erected in the town, in the North Circuit. And in the South new chapels have been built at Farnworth, Edgworth, Little Lever, and Harwood, also a considerable extension at Darcy Lever. It is gratifying to notice a steady increase of members in both circuits, which together number nearly 3,000, also a large increase to the different congregations.

“ All thanks be to God,
Who scatters abroad,
Throughout every place,
By the least of His servants, His savour of grace.
Who the victory gave,
The praise let Him have,
For the work He hath done,
All honour and glory to Jesus alone.”

In conclusion we observe—

1. That we are *under a debt of gratitude* to the early Methodists, who, “ by patient continuance in well-doing, have turned scorn and hatred into general esteem and goodwill.” Of this people Mr. Wesley wrote, “ the society here are true, original Methodists ; they are not conformed to the world, neither in its maxims, its spirit, nor its fashions, but are simple followers of the Lamb, consequently they increase both in grace and numbers.” [Journal, vol. 4, page 199.] To what extent we have been, and still are, indebted to the piety and zeal of this early community, we can never fully estimate. “ They laboured, and we are entered into their labours.”

2. We may profit by their *holy example*. They laid the cause of Methodism, which they believed to be the cause of God, really to heart. It is morally certain, from what we have known of some of them, that they felt as deep an interest in it as they did in their own worldly concerns, nay deeper. In the work of the church of God they were happy, and its success became their chief joy. Those who knew Geo. Eskrick and others of that day, have repeatedly borne testimony that their singular dress, their solemn demeanour, but above all, their holy walk and conversation, placed them at a marked distance from other men ; they were of “ another spirit ” altogether from the world around

them, sustaining at all times their profession by steady consistency of character, they secured the confidence and esteem of their neighbours, and were fit instruments to promote the cause of the Redeemer.

3. We shall do well to emulate their *zeal*. This was truly aggressive. The salvation of men was their constant aim. For this they earnestly prayed. They laboured for this. Zeal for God was a fire which they kept constantly burning, and they were always ready for every "good word and work." Of such it may be said,

"With grace abundantly endued,
A pure believing multitude ;
They all were of one heart and soul,
And only love inspired the whole."

This primitive spirit is the great want of the church of Christ at the present day. Were the members of our own community imbued with this spirit more plentifully, it would be less difficult to find suitable agencies to fill up official ranks in the church, in those departments where fervent piety is essential to success.

Should this brief paper be the means of leading any to seek and cultivate the spirit of early Methodism, the labour will be amply repaid, and the writer abundantly rewarded.